

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

May 5, 1983

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
IN INTERVIEW WITH
REPORTERS GEORGE CONDON OF COPLEY NEWS SERVICE,
BRUCE DRAKE OF THE NEW YORK DAILY NEWS,
SARA FRITZ OF U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT,
CARL LEUBSDORF OF THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS,
CHRIS WALLACE OF NBC,
AND
STEVE WEISMAN OF THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Oval Office

2:09 P.M. EDT

Q Mr. President, the Roman Catholic Bishops, as you know, voted overwhelmingly yesterday in favor of a resolution calling for a halt in the nuclear arms race. Is that going to complicate your administration's efforts in trying to head off the nuclear freeze movement?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I don't really think so, particularly if those of you who are going to be commenting on this will wait, as we have to, until we have a chance to see the 45,000-word letter. I think that too much attention was being paid to the one word, "curb" or "halt," when you think there's 45,000 words in toto. We haven't received it yet. I have had some information in advance about it, which indicates that it really is a legitimate effort to do exactly what we're doing, and that is to try to find ways toward world peace. And if so, then we're both doing the same thing.

Q But isn't it true that if a number of leading Catholic Bishops -- archbishops, cardinals such as we've seen during this debate -- go around the country, either to their parishes or in other forms, and say, as they are saying, that we think nuclear -- the use of nuclear weapons is wrong -- and some of them are saying, in fact, we see no way that nuclear weapons should ever be used -- isn't that going to have an influence on the debate?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, is it really? Is there anyone that really favors using those weapons or that wants to see them? Our own proposals in START and INF are aimed at starting to reduce those weapons. And my own hope is that maybe once we start, that we can completely eliminate them. What we're talking about is a weapon that is so contrary to what used to be, before Hitler invented total war -- what used to be the policy of all nations by way of the Geneva rules and regulations concerning warfare. And that is that you did not make civilians targets of war. We used to have very specific rules about that in the rules of warfare. And then came total war in World War II, and, yes, all of the nations finally were doing it with the conventional weapons, bombing and so forth.

But this now -- can anyone -- granted that your weapons are targeted on weapons, but this kind of weapon can't help but have an effect on the population as a whole. So they're not saying anything we don't say, that God forbid those weapons should ever be used.

Q Could you clarify it, Mr. President?

THE PRESIDENT: What?

Q Are you saying that based on what you've seen so far,

MORE

- 2 -

there is nothing inconsistent in the bishops' letter with your administration's policies?

THE PRESIDENT: As I say, I have not seen it yet and 45,000 words are a lot to digest. But what I'm saying is that I think their purpose is the same as ours. They're looking for a way toward peace and promoting world peace. And that's what we're also looking for. And I think that -- just deal in the specifics. And so far, all of the accounts of this, and all of the reporting has dealt on that one word as if the difference between "curb" and "halt" -- We've had some indications that, in reality, there are many things in there that we'll have no quarrel with at all.

Q Mr. President, Soviet leader Andropov yesterday made a new offer in the medium-range missile talks. Do you see anything positive in what he called for yesterday?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, the very fact that they have moved toward -- discussing warheads instead of missiles. We feel that way and have felt that way for some time that this is what we should be negotiating. And we're going to give this serious consideration as we do any proposal that they make. And I will be talking to Dr. Nitze before he returns to the INF talks about this and I can't go beyond that now in giving any indication --

Q -- I might just follow up. What about the fact that he continues to want to include the British and the French missiles, the fact that he's not talking about Soviet missiles in Asia?

THE PRESIDENT: This is, as I say, this is going to take careful consideration to see where it figures in with what we're trying to accomplish in those meetings and I can't go beyond it because then you get into the very area of talking about negotiations and you can't do that in advance.

Q Mr. President, I was wondering, the administration has initially seemed to characterize what Andropov said as less than sweeping in terms of the changes that he's offered. I was wondering whether you felt, based on what you've seen, read, and heard, whether this seemed to you like a sincere effort on his part to break the impasse or whether it was just another chapter in the propaganda back and forth.

THE PRESIDENT: This will be determined, I think, when the negotiators get back there and are actually at the meetings. But as I say, the encouraging thing was that he made a proposal and it was a proposal that aimed at something that has been a consideration of ours and that is that we should be negotiating warheads and not just missiles.

Now, you won't know until you really sit across the table from them whether he was -- whether this was just propaganda or a proposal.

Q Are you saying that you think this improves chances for an agreement this year?

THE PRESIDENT: I can't put a time limit on it. Remember, it took seven years to get the SALT agreement. I can only say that the very fact that they're at the table, returning to the table is encouraging, to me, when you look back at the history all the way to

MORE

- 5 -

Q Mr. President, I'd like to go back to what the committee actually did yesterday in voting the cutoff. CIA Director Casey is reported to have said it would lead to a blood-bath for the guerrillas inside the country. Do you agree with that? And how seriously do you take what the committee does? How bad would it be if that cutoff of covert aid went through?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I'm saying if -- well, if that became the policy, I think it would set a very dangerous precedent. The executive branch of government and the Congress has a shared responsibility, as I pointed out in my speech, for foreign policy. And we have -- we each have a place in formulating foreign policy, but we each have a responsibility also. And I think that what I said about this was that it was very irresponsible. And it was -- it literally was taking away the ability of the executive branch to carry out its constitutional responsibilities.

Q Do you believe that it would lead to the blood-bath that the CIA Director talked about?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I haven't heard his entire remark in connection with that term or how he described it or what he meant with it. I'll make it a point to find out. I once used a bloodbath term as Governor of California, and one individual reversed it in the press and had it saying the opposite of what I had intended it to say and I never did quite get the situation cleared up.

Q Well, what -- I don't understand. What's wrong with the committee's position? What difference does it make if instead of giving covert aid to the guerrillas in Nicaragua, you give overt aid to the countries of El Salvador and Honduras to stop the flow of weapons through their countries, which is what you say you want in the first place? What's wrong with that?

THE PRESIDENT: Except then the only help that you can give is through other governments. And I don't think that -- I don't think that's an effective thing to do, and how do you know that the other governments would want to themselves, then, participate in helping the people that need the help? In other words, we'd be asking some other government to do what our own -- what our Congressional -- or our Congress has said that we can't do.

Q Let me ask you a broad foreign policy question that comes up with all this -- some of these other negotiations. You've been in office now more than two years, more than half of the term for which you were elected. And the arms talks are going along with no clear end in sight. The Middle East situation, if anything, has gotten worse. We're trying to get an agreement now to get the Israelis out of Lebanon, where a year ago they weren't -- hadn't even gone into Lebanon yet. And then our relations with China have deteriorated. We've had a lot of problems in Western Europe. What do you say to those critics who say that your foreign policy has been very unsuccessful so far and that it's produced nothing?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I say that that's a very distorted picture. And I think that we've made great progress. Beirut is no longer being shelled on a daily basis around the clock, fifteen hours of bombardment in one day.

MORE

- 6 -

Yes, we are down to negotiating -- sure, there are incidents -- but we are down to negotiating the withdrawal of foreign forces after eight years of combat and invasion and harrassment from outside as well as inside in Lebanon.

With regard to Western Europe, I do not believe that the NATO Alliance has ever been any more solid than it is now, or that there has been a better relationship between us and our NATO Allies. The same thing is true in Asia and Japan with the ASEAN nations. I could wish that we could move faster in some of these things. And when you say the arms talks, as I said before, it took seven years for the SALT talks.

Q Four years ago when the Carter administration was in its third year, they had completed the Camp David agreement and the treaty from that, the SALT Treaty was about to be negotiated, normalization with China had taken place, and the Panama Canal Treaty had been approved. So they had some tangible things which they had achieved. Can you name several, besides the opening up of Beirut, that you have achieved?

THE PRESIDENT: In the first place, China relations had been normalized by the visits of a previous President to the previous administration. And he carried on from there. And I am not at all sure that added anything to what had already been accomplished.

With regard to the Camp David agreement, yes, they started. And we are proceeding within the framework of those agreements, because those agreements were simply to begin negotiations. And it was after we got in that the principal step between Egypt and Israel was carried out, which was the return of the Sinai. And what we are actually doing now is trying to bring about the negotiations that had been proposed and apparently, then, accepted -- which was to negotiate the West Bank and try to bring peace in the Middle East.

But we are the ones who have gone a step beyond that with regard to trying to have an overall peace in the entire area. That had never been proposed.

Q Mr. President, you said the other day that too much attention had been focused on bringing the PLO into the negotiations. I am wondering, do you have a plan to proceed without the PLO if they decide not to become a part of the process?

THE PRESIDENT: This would require, of course, the agreement of the other Arab states -- of the Arab states. And, since the negotiations we are trying to bring about are between the Arab states and Israel for peace in the region, we have to recognize their positions with regard to this.

It would take their agreeing to go forward in negotiations without the PLO. I must say that the contact we had with the heads of many Arab states after the change in the supposed agreement between

MORE